

**RTF 323-2 Experimental Film and Video: Contemporary Issues**  
Spring 2009  
MW 1-3  
LOUIS 119

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**Prerequisites:** RTF majors; completion of required 200 level courses; nonmajors RTF 220 or senior standing; grads: permission of instructor.

The course examines creative film and video which plays with the nature of the medium itself. Sometimes seen as self-reflexive, sometimes as aesthetically polemical, sometimes as playful joking, and sometimes as theoretical investigations, these works invite the audience to experience and think "outside the box" of conventional media. Through new patterns of perception and cognition, audiences actively engage with form as well as content. By foregrounding basic elements such as duration, screen, editing, and sound/image relation, the materiality of the medium, etc. new forms of narration and spectacle emerge. The course will range through dramatic fiction, documentary, animation, and art film from the origins of sound recording and cinema to the latest screen and audio technologies. We will view and study works that push the boundaries of conventional media and ask fundamental questions about how we make, use, enjoy, and understand film, video, and new media.

Makers studied will include Dziga Vertov, Marie Menken, Stan Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, Buster Keaton, Paul Sharits, Ernie Gehr, Jerry Lewis, Joyce Wieland, Takahiko Iimura, Peter Rose, Su Friedrich, Ken Jacobs, Michael Snow, Dan Graham, Joan Jonas, Mako Idemitsu, Dan Reeves, Joseph Cornell, Abigail Child, Martin Arnold, and others

This is a heavy viewing class. Attendance is required since much work will be shown in class is not available for screening at other times. Students are required to attend some outside screenings in Chicago, view additional films and tapes online and at the NU library. Blackboard discussions; midterm, and take-home final.

**Books and readings** :There are no required books for the course. Some key readings will be on e-reserve or available online. There will be some handouts in class. Also, key information will be available on CMS (Course Management System , aka Blackboard) on a rolling basis.

Because this class uses more films/videos than any other one taught in the department, and because they come from many different sources, by different shipping methods, there will inevitably be slight changes to the schedule of works shown.

No computers, phones, etc.

Be aware: Many of the films/tapes shown in this course affront established mainstream values: aesthetic, social, political, moral, religious, etc. Some contain (among other things) representations of nudity, violence, sexual activity (including various perversions), drug use, racial stereotyping, rape, incest, bodily fluids, blasphemy, shakey hand-held camerawork, as well as mocking of official government policy, Christianity, normative heterosexuality, patriarchal values, and suburbia.

## M MAR 30

Stan Brakhage, MOTHLIGHT 16mm on DVD (show twice)

Mary Beams, GOING HOME SKETCHBOOK (1975, b&w, so, 3 min) F1049

Larry Gottheim FOGLINE (CK copy)

Noel Burch, CORRECTION PLEASE, OR HOW WE GOT INTO PICTURES (*film, shown on VHS video; co/so, c.35 min CK copy*)

## W APRIL 1

[WARNING: The Sharits film has drastic frame-to-frame changes in image, producing a flickering and strobing effect. Those who become dizzy or disoriented from such effects, as well as those suffering from photosensitive epilepsy may be at risk. On the other hand, you may frame it as the kind of dizzy

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experience that many kids love of just spinning and spinning until you fall down laughing.]

Paul Sharits T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G (1968, 16mm, color/so, 12m, Canyon)

Standish Lawder, NECROLOGY (1969-70, 16mm, b&w/so, 10m, DVD)

Owen Land, New Improved Institutional Quality, (1976, 16mm on DVD, co/so, 10min.)

## M APRIL 6

Michael Snow, WAVELENGTH

(1966-1967, 16mm, color/so, 45m, Canyon)

Alla presents Breer

Robert Breer, JAMESTOWN BALOOS (1957, 16mm, color/so, 6m; Canyon)(shown twice)

Robert Breer, FUJI (1974, 16mm, color/so, 8.5m; Canyon)(shown twice)

Martin Arnold, ALONE, LIFE WASTES ANDY HARDY (1998, 16mm, b&w/so, 15 min; Canyon)

follow up viewing on the web: <http://www.tank.tv/archive.php>

Ken Jacobs, ONTIC ANTICS STARRING LAUREL AND HARDY; BYE MOLLY (2005, b&w, so., 5.37 min of 60 min.)

## W APRIL 8

Invasion and appropriation

Dominic Angername, VOYEURISTIC TENDENCIES (1984, 16mm, b&w/so, 17m, Canyon)

Scott Stark, NOEMA (1998, 16mm, color/so, 11 min; Canyon)

Dorothy Wiley, MISS JESUS FRIES ON GRILL (1973, 16mm, color/so, 12 min; Canyon)

Lenny Lipton, DOGGIE DINER AND THE RETURN OF DOGGIE DINER (1969, color, sound, 7 min. Canyon)

George Kuchar, I, AN ACTRESS (1977, 16mm, b&w/so, 9 min. on DVD)

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### More Kuchar On Ubuweb

Chuck—intro to TOM, TOM, THE PIPER'S SON, interminable analysis as an aesthetic strategy

#### M APRIL 13

Preparation: on UbuWeb:  
Ernie Gehr, EUREKA

\*\*\*special conditions\*\*\*film will commence exactly at the start of class (1 pm and will end at 2.55 pm), if we can show it at the correct speed.

Ken Jacobs  
TOM, TOM, THE PIPER'S SON  
(1969, b&w/color, 115 min. Silent, 16 fps, Canyon)

#### W APRIL 15

Discuss TTTPS

Baring the Device

Antonioni, ECLIPSE (excerpt, the still minute)  
Dziga Vertov, THE MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (excerpt, the editor at work)  
THE LADY IN THE LAKE (excerpt, opening sequence)  
Woody Allen/Senkichi Taniguchi, WHAT'S UP, TIGER LILY? (1966, excerpt)  
Rene Vienet, CAN DIALECTICS BREAK BRICKS? (excerpt)  
Carl Reiner, DEAD MEN DON'T WEAR PLAID (excerpt)

#### M APRIL 20

Changing the terms: avant garde and commercial mainstream

Buster Keaton, SHERLOCK, JR. (excerpt—into the screen, changing backgrounds)  
Dziga Vertov, TMWAMC (excerpt—the theatre)  
Maya Deren, MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON (16mm film)  
Chuck Jones, DUCK AMUCK (co/so 7 min. on DVD)  
Associated reading: Dana Polan in Jump Cut:  
<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC17folder/BrechtPolan.html>  
Jerry Lewis, THE BELLBOY (excerpt on DVD, picture taking episode)

Ken Jacobs, THE DOCTOR'S DREAM (1978 16mm, black and white, sound, 23 min, FMC)

**W APRIL 22**

Hand out mid-term take home

Set up for take home mid-term: changing time, changing narrative  
(Excerpts) (all will be on reserve at NU library reserve)

MEMENTO

RUN, LOLA, RUN

GROUNDHOG DAY

TIME CODE

IRREVERSIBLE

ARARAT

Hollis Frampton, POETIC JUSTICE (HAPAX LEGOMENA II) (1972, b&w, silent, 31 min., FMC)

**M APRIL 27**

Deliberate deception

Ernie Gehr, SHIFT (1972-74, color, sound, 9 min. Canyon)

Hollis Frampton, (NOSTALGIA), 1971 (Hapax Legomena I) (1973) 16mm, black and white, sound, 36 min (on DVD)

Leighton Pierce, PINK SOCKS (CK)

**W APRIL 29**

***TAKE HOME MIDTERM DUE AT START OF CLASS***

The materiality of film, 1; and the body

Carolee Schneeman, FUSES. Fuses- Newly Restored Version with Added Footage (1967) 16mm, sound, 30 min FMC

Carolee Schneemann – “Fuses” (1967) 16mm, sound, 30 min

Izabella Pruska-Oldenhoff – “Her Carnal Longings” (2003) 16 mm, sound, 8.5 min

Adam Beckett – “Flesh Folds” (1974) 16mm, sound, 6.5 min

Kathy Rose – excerpts from “Primitive Movers” (1983) and “Syncopations” (1987), DVD, sound, 10 min of excerpts

**M MAY 4**

The materiality of film, 2

Bill Morrison, DECASIA (67 min) (on DVD)

**W MAY 6**

Inclass midterm—space flattened

TBA

**M MAY 11**

Oscar Fischinger – “Radio Dynamics” (1942), DVD, silent, 4 min

John Whitney – “Matrix III” (1972), Laserdisk or DVD burn, sound, 10 min

Ryan Larkin – “Street Musique” (1972), DVD, sound, 9 min

Chris Landreth – “Ryan” (2006), DVD, sound, 13 min

David O'Reilly – “RGB XYZ” (2007), DVD PAL, sound, 13 min

**W MAY 13**

Chris Marker, LA JETEE (F1141)

Ken Jacobs, PERFECT FILM (1986) 16mm, black and white, sound, 22 min

FMC

**M MAY 18**

Leighton Pierce, FIFTY FEET OF STRING (DVD CK

**W MAY 20**

Dan Zox presents:

Abigail Child, *Surface Noise*

2000, 16mm, color/b&w/so, 18m (Canyon)

and

*The Future Is Behind You* (21min, B&W, film transferred to video) (from maker)

**M MAY 25 MEMORIAL DAY (HOLIDAY—no class)****W MAY 27**

Andy Warhol, BLOWJOB 26 min. V1532

**M JUNE 1**

Pat O'Neill, WATER AND POWER (Laserdisk)

**W JUNE 3**

Jem Cohen, LOST BOOK FOUND M1042

## EXAM WEEK

### Assignments.

**Reports.** All undergrad students are required to turn in three reports of about 500-750 words on outside events (off campus, attend in person), to the Digital Drop Box on CMS. One is due every two weeks. Two additional report will be an analysis of two films/videos/etc. available online, for a total of 5 reports. One every two weeks. No late papers. The site reports may be subjective or objective, concentrate on the overall experience or just one film/tape, etc. There will be a list of suitable screenings/events on CMS/Blackboard. The purpose of these fieldwork assignments is to give students additional screenings and experiences in Chicago's avant garde art and media community. 25% of final grade for undergrads; Grads must do two outside event reports and one online report: 15% for grads.

Grad students have an additional assignment (20% of final grade), to do additional outside reading, equivalent to a book. Grads must prepare a 2-3 page set of notes, questions, or topics related to the outside reading (for distribution to the other students) (due May. 17, posted on CMS).

**Exams.** The midterm will count 30% of the final grade. Part one consists of a 5 page take home essay on one of the narrative films listed for April 22 OR a discussion of narrative in relation to Frampton's *Poetic Justice*. (15% of grade) and then an inclass essay written after viewing a work shown in class (15%) You may want to use Netflix or some other way to see the narratives in advance.

The final (35% of final grade) will be for undergrads a choice: (a) a take-home essay based on screenings during the last four classes of the quarter, or (b) an in-class exam in two parts: writing an essay after seeing an unannounced film (about 40 min). The second part is over the entire course--screenings, readings, lectures and discussion. Grads must do the take home exam.

#### Final grade formula:

undergrads--discussion (includes CMS); 10%, five outside screening reports 25%; midterm 30%, final 35%. grads--discussion 10%, midterm 20%, three outside screening reports 15%; reading/presentation report 25%, final 30%.

For the first Outside assignment, students may choose either the current shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art or the galleries of 20th Century painting at the Art Institute (Michigan at Adams). Free Tuesday.

## A note on grading

Your grade on the written exercises and final paper will be based on your ability to integrate many of the issues discussed in class and the readings and screenings into an effective, coherent, well-written, and well-organized essay. The purpose of the CMS assignments and final paper is to spur you to make connections between VIDEOS and reading that may not have been explicitly made during class discussions. Thus, a mere reiteration of what I or the writers have said will not by itself be an effective use of the essay exam or term paper format.

### Grading criteria:

A An "A" paper or exam represents effort far beyond the basic requirements of the course and is characterized by a bold and original thesis which the student supports with a range of examples from the films and readings. The "A" essay is flawlessly, even elegantly written. These essays are quite rare.

B A "B" essay demonstrates an informed familiarity with all of the films and relevant readings and employs examples effectively to support the central thesis of the piece. The writing should be forceful and effective with many previously hidden connections between the films and readings brought to light.

C A "C" effort represents a coherent and effective reiteration of relevant material from the lectures and discussions accented by an effective use of reading where appropriate. The writing is functional and effective with minimal problems in diction, grammar and mechanics. The great majority of undergraduate essays usually fall within this range.

D A "D" is characterized by minimal engagement with the most important topics from lecture and some use of the most obvious material for the readings. Often, a "C" essay in terms of content is lowered to a "D" because of significant problems with effective writing. In terms of content, the "D" effort often results from a desperate last-minute effort to engage with readings and/or films that the student has not seen or read or from significant absence from class discussion.

F An "F" essay possesses none, or at least very few, of the redeeming characteristics listed above. Typically, these are even more rare than the "A's."

All provisions of the School of Communications and Northwestern University codes and procedures for academic honesty are enforced.

### **Students with Disabilities**

In compliance with Northwestern University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Request for academic accommodations need to be made during the first week of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are required to register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

For more information, visit: <http://www.northwestern.edu/disability/>

### **Academic Integrity at Northwestern**

Students are expected to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak to the instructor before the assignment is due and/or examine the University web site. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam (e.g., copying others' answers, providing information to others, using a crib sheet) or plagiarism of a paper (e.g., taking material from sources without citation, copying another student's paper). Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result in a loss of credit for that assignment—at a minimum.

Other penalties may also apply. The guidelines for determining academic dishonesty and procedures followed in a suspected incident of academic dishonesty are detailed on the university and school websites. For more information, visit:

[http://www.communication.northwestern.edu/programs/undergraduate/policies\\_procedures/academic\\_integrity/](http://www.communication.northwestern.edu/programs/undergraduate/policies_procedures/academic_integrity/)

### **Sexual Harassment Policy**

It is the policy of Northwestern University that no male or female member of the Northwestern community—students, faculty, administrators, or staff—may sexually harass any other member of the community. Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute harassment when:

- submission to such conduct is made or threatened to be made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual's employment or education; or
- submission to or rejection of such conduct is used or threatened to be used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting that individual; or
- such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating what a reasonable person would sense as an intimidating, hostile, or offensive employment, educational, or living environment.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment/policy/index.html>